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Affirmation

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Concerns

Summer 1995 Volume 20 Number 2

Affirmation at General Conference

Presence

Affirmation will be at General Conference in many ways. We will publish a daily newsletter, throw a celebrative banquet, lead a memorial service, host a hospitality room and meet daily to process and strategize. As in the past, we will create spontaneous activities, for fun and for witness. We will coordinate our legislative lobbying with MFSA.

Rainbow hued scarves and stoles will identify our representatives as we give out newsletters or take part in activities. These same scarves and stoles will be for sale as a fund-raiser for our presence.

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...many opportunities for volunteers...

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There will be many opportunities for volunteers to work with the Affirmation presence. We have reserved rooms in a nearby hotel and hope to have some local housing as well.

Please turn to page six...

PEOPLE OF FAITH FOR JUSTICE: AN INTERFAITH NETWORK

Believing that a compassionate community is better than a mean-spirited one, grassroots organizers plan to mobilize nation-wide efforts to overturn the religious right's attacks on sexual minorities. A strategy conference held April 28-30 in Eugene, Oregon, set plans in motion to organize a national interfaith network to promote social justice for sexual minorities. Nineteen assembled leaders, drawn from religious and sexual minority constituencies, formed a coordinating committee that will call a conference to launch a national organization.

The purpose of the new organization will be to challenge the use of religious doctrine to justify discrimination, to affirm the civil right of sexual minorities, and advocate their full participation in faith communities. Faith voices must respond together to the political and religious dismantling of civil rights in the U.S. You, too, can be part of this work. For further information about the national interfaith network contact Michael Hawk, [redacted] Dayton, OH [redacted].

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A major highlight of the April 21-23 National Affirmation Twentieth Anniversary Gathering was the Saturday morning keynote address "A Chosen People?" given by Morris Floyd. If you would like one or more copies of this address (for the cost of printing and postage) write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204 or call (708) 733-9590. **Note: The address will be printed only if six or more requests are received,** in which case they will be ready after June 1st. *Place orders NOW!*

Reflections on the National Gathering in Dallas

Celebrating 20 Years of Affirmation

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us... *Hebrews 12:1 (NRSV)*

As I arrived at the hotel in Dallas, I soon found myself in the midst of a "great cloud of witnesses" who had certainly run the race with perseverance. From my past experience, I had read about Affirmation, been encouraged by its efforts especially at General Conference, and even found support for myself and my ministry from several individuals from the Affirmation family. Yet, here I was in the actual "middle-of-things" meeting many of the people who were (and are) pioneers in a powerful witness of inclusivity.

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I was grateful to find myself in such a gathering of saints...
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I found great joy in being surrounded by "so great a cloud of witnesses" and hearing the past stories of those women and men who had struggled so diligently to move our United Methodist Church to full inclusion of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons. I gained strength and power from hearing the journeys of both those living and those who have now passed on. Names, which had only been distant symbols of courage and struggle, were now embodied before me as real living creations of God. Slides, stories, tears, candles, songs and photographs were set before me as a reminder of the past efforts and provided a foundation of courage and hope for my ministry with the Reconciling Congregation Program and my own journey. I was grateful to find myself in such a gathering of saints and looked forward to the day when my own story would soon find itself among the threads of the fabric called Affirmation.

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Missing were the voices of youth...also not present...were the many new faces needed...for the race set before us.
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Yet, as I met fantastic people and developed wonderful friendships, I also looked around to find others like me and those younger than me who would some day join the race set before us. Absent were the faces of university and college students, both gay/lesbian/bisexual and non-gay, who are actively working to transform their campuses and the church into truly "welcoming" places for all people. Missing were the voices of youth, gay/lesbian/bisexual and non-gay who are also committed to a diverse and accepting United Methodist Church. Also not present in the Affirmation family portrait were the many new faces needed to bring new energy and endurance for the race set before us.

I do give thanks for being a part of the 20 year celebration and gaining strength from the powerful work of the past. Excitement abounds as the challenge of outreach and growth is set before us. It seems to me that in the midst of such "a great cloud of witnesses" we now are called to explore new and innovative opportunities for sharing the story of Affirmation. I look forward to being a part of that effort!

James Preston
Outreach Coordinator, RCP

Another point of view:

Reflections on the National Gathering

I have been sensing a ground swell of support for lesbian, gay and bisexual issues and Reconciling Congregations (RCs) lately. Here in Austin, last week a heterosexual minister went on a two week hunger strike to protest the mistreatment of homosexuals within the United Methodist Church. He sent a letter of his intent to the Council of Bishops, who are meeting here in Austin, requesting a response from them.

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...many heterosexual families...do not want to raise their children in environments of hate...and bigotry...
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Maybe it's just the timing within my stage of life, being ready to push the institutional church on its issues and maybe it's my reading several "coming out" stories at this time. But I also feel that there are many heterosexual families who do not want to raise their children in environments of hate, hostility and bigotry and are looking for RCs in which to affiliate with their families.

Continued on next page...

At the same time I was very moved by Morris Floyd when he stated that we (homosexual and bisexual men and women) have an inheritance (our rightful place in the church) from God which we must claim for ourselves. We can't allow others to deprive us of what is rightfully ours. This means that we must risk standing up for ourselves. And the time is now.

Also, at the Saturday session, in preparation for worship, I was in the liturgy/worship/singing group and some of the hymns moved me to tears, to the point where I couldn't sing. Feelings of loss came up, loss of friends who have left the ministry/church because it has been dragging its feet and loss of my friends who have died of HIV, with whom I miss singing, embracing and laughing.

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...if justice is to prevail...we, all of us, must stand up and let our voices be heard.

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The weekend also brought up some fear. . .that of going to General Conference. But at the same time I gained some confidence in knowing that I was not alone. There was strength in our Affirmation gathering as in the vigil held this week for the minister, Rev. Charles Moore of Grace UMC, who was fasting. The Church must understand that if justice is to prevail, the Gospel is to be truly proclaimed, that we, all of us, must stand up and let our voices be heard. This is the time and we are the people of God. We are not alone because nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Yes, it was a great meeting, just as my first one in 1979 in Akron, Ohio, had been. I was embraced with the love of God and the love of my brothers and sisters present and symbolically all across the country in our respective denominations and congregations.

Rev. Richard Bates

Affirmation Council Meets

As is the tradition, the Affirmation Council met the Friday before the National Gathering in Dallas, Texas. The Council continues to rely on committees for the bulk of the work that is accomplished. Some of the specific work done by these committees will be evident from other articles in this newsletter.

It was during the Council meeting that Tom Russell, a regionally elected member from the Northeast, submitted his resignation. He said his energies need to be spent on his returning to school and the start-up of a new business. The other Council members wished him luck in his new endeavors. Upon the expression of sadness and loss to Affirmation, and to the Council in particular, at the announcement of Tom's departure from the Council, he vowed he was only taking a break and that he would be back.

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...important for us to gather...as a family, before going into General Conference.

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An action taken by the Council that will be of particular interest to the membership is the decision to hold a Gathering in the Spring of 1996. In a previous newsletter the announcement was made that the Council had decided not to have a Spring Gathering due to General Conference. That decision was made due, partially, to the energy expended at General Conference and the concern that there would be no energy left to organize a Spring Gathering. As the Council met in Dallas the issue was revisited. It was the consensus that it is important for us to gather as a group, as a family, before going into General Conference. No formal program will be offered but there will be a time for us to celebrate who we are as a family, taking the theme of our platform statement "And Grace Will Lead Us Home." Watch for more information to follow.

Due to the election of new Council members by the Affirmation membership present in Dallas, this was the last time this Council would meet so a special time of sharing was held at the end of the day. Expressions of gratitude abounded.

Following the National Gathering the Council convened once again with the newly elected members who could be present in Dallas. One of the tasks presented to the new Council was the determination of who would serve in the various roles within the Council. The results of that task are as follows:

Co-Spokespersons:	Jeanne Knepper and Morris Floyd
Co-Coordinators:	Ellie Charlton and John Calhoun
Committee Convenors:	
Witness:	Rebecca Richards
Evangelism:	David Gunnell
Planning & Evaluation:	Jeanne Barnett
Program:	Woman from Nashville
Stewardship:	Sam Wilson

Affirmation National Council

Richard Bates
Austin, TX
[redacted]

Jeanne Barnett
Sacramento, CA
[redacted]

Robert Bryant
Atlanta, GA
[redacted]

John R. Calhoun
Oklahoma City, OK
[redacted]

Ellie Charlton
Sacramento, CA
[redacted]

Morris Floyd
Minneapolis, MN
[redacted]

David L. Gunnell
Evanston, IL
[redacted]

Judy Cara Hicks
Evanston, IL
[redacted]

Rick Huskey
Washington, DC
[redacted]

Jeanne Knepper
Portland, OR
[redacted]

Nancy Levan
Fresno, CA
[redacted]

Ann Freeman Price
Nyack, NY
[redacted]

Rebecca Richards
Baltimore, MD
[redacted]

Tom Russell
Washington, DC
[redacted]

Paul Thompson
Studio City, CA
[redacted]

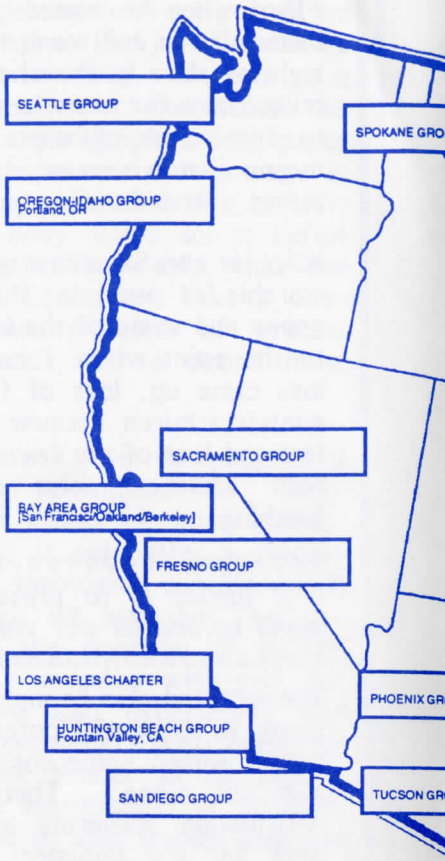
Judith WestLee
Minneapolis, MN
[redacted]

Mark Wilson
Tuscaloosa, AL
[redacted]

Sam Wilson
Dallas, TX
[redacted]

One woman in New York

One woman in Tennessee



LOCAL NE

Dallas Affirmation did a wonderful job hosting the National Affirmation 20th Anniversary meeting in April. A special thanks should go out to Sam Wilson for all the work he did. In February, the Rev. James Preston, spoke about the Reconciling Congregation Program. Rev. Preston was recently hired as Outreach Coordinator of the RCP Program. At the March meeting, Rebecca S. Covell spoke about "Legal Landmines". Drawing from her work in the gay and lesbian community, Rebecca shared some of the special issues that face gay and lesbian individuals. The group usually meets every fourth Monday at 7:00 pm, at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northaven Road. The Third Sunday Lunches are regular gatherings of Affirmation members and their friends. For additional information write to [redacted] Dallas, Texas [redacted].

Affirmation Los Angeles has been holding discussions of the possibilty of forming an Affirmation chapter in the San Fernando Valley. Mark Bowman, Program Coordinator of the Reconciling Congregation Program, spoke at the January Meeting. Affirmation Los Angeles meets the second Sunday of each month for programs, worship, refreshments and fellowship at Homan UMC at 7:00 p.m. For more information write to [redacted] West Hollywood, CA [redacted] or call [redacted].

Nashville Affirmation
Nashville Affirmation meets monthly for a potluck and a time of fellowship at Edgewood UMC, 1502 Edgehill Avenue. In March evening togetl information abou and other ac Affirmation, [redacted].

Affirmation Conference
worship service e 8:30 pm in the N UMC, 83 Main S York. Several mer series at a Pr dealing with sexua response by the For more informa [redacted] Binghamto call [redacted].

Central Virgi
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Affirmation Newsletter
Published by the Evangelism Committee of National Affirmation
David Gunnell, Chairperson
George Hodgdon, Editor

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Affirmation Newsletter is published quarterly and is mailed to every member of National Affirmation.

The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons.

Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of National Affirmation.

We reserve the right to edit or reject any material submitted for publication.

PLEASE NOTE:

On Saturday afternoon in Dallas, national gathering participants met by regions to continue planning for fall 1995 regional Affirmation gatherings. Watch for details to be announced in the next issue of this newsletter (due out in August).

From the Editor's Corner

"Onward Christian Soldiers...

Marching as to war..." And it is a war that we are facing in this country, and we had better be prepared for it! We are talking not only about lesbians, gays and bisexuals, but about all Americans who cherish true freedom.

We are facing many a battle with the religious right in the years ahead. Many of us, before Oklahoma City, thought we were fighting only for "gay rights" for ourselves and our gay friends. Now we realize that all of our friends, our families, our very society, are threatened by the radical right. If we don't agree with them and their mistaken idea of what America stands for we will be ostracized, punished, or obliterated.

What can we do to help win this war? If ever there was a time for lesbians, gays and bisexuals to stand up and be counted, now is that time! We must take our stand not only against the oppession of our own kind, but of all those whom the radical right consider "different." We know what it is like to be hated for who we are. This is our chance to lead the way "treading where the saints have trod," helping our fellow Americans to see the real danger that lies ahead.

Whether we like it or not, we must become militant Christians (perhaps militantly Christian is a better designation) and do all we can to defeat the foe. There are organizations that we can join, including "People of Faith for Justice" mentioned in an article in this issue. Plus other lesbian/gay and non-gay groups, too. We need to form strong relationships with all people who are fighting the fanatic right in order to preserve our own rights and the rights of all Americans.

Does it go against Christ's teachings to use the metaphor of "war" in this manner? No, not at all since Christ himself said "...I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34 NIV). Not that these words are to be taken literally, any more than our use of "Onward Christian Soldiers."

To quote another hymn, "O young and fearless Prophet of ancient Galilee, thy life is still a summons to serve humanity; to make our thoughts and actions less prone to please the crowd, to stand with humble courage for truth with hearts uncowed." (S. Ralph Harlow)

We must understand and always remember that we do stand for the truth of the Gospel--and it is this truth which shall make us free!

If we are true Christian soldiers, Christ is our leader and his cross and banners will lead us on!

(Please note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the editor and not necessarily those of National Affirmation.)

A Chosen People?

The following is a synopsis of Morris Floyd's keynote address at the National Gathering in Dallas, reprinted from Shalom to You.

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A challenge!

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. . . Morris Floyd challenged the lesbian, gay and bisexual community to let go of its emphasis on alienation and exile and claim instead a sense of being a chosen people.

As exiles, he said, we too eagerly accept tiny tokens of fellowship and progress from the church and people who still call us unacceptable. We cooperate with allies who see us as victims they are helping even as they claim that we would not be credible if we spoke for ourselves.

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...believe Genesis and incarnation...

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Floyd called on lesbians, gay men and bisexual people to believe Genesis and incarnation: that what God created is good and that God is with us.

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...God's holy people...

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When lesbian, gay and bisexual people understand that they have been chosen to be God's holy people as they are, they should:

1. Come out, claiming the inheritance in their own names;
2. Judge all of the Bible against the gospel message.
3. Refuse cheap fellowship if it's offered without confrontation of the sins of homophobia and heterosexism;
4. Direct study toward homophobia, not homosexuality; and
5. Get beyond a certain idolatry of the church and ordination, recognizing that the church cannot invalidate God's call to ministry.

Floyd called upon Affirmation to be cautious about self-righteousness and isolation, to demythologize the power of institutional structures and to do more theological reflection from within the lesbian, gay and bisexual experience.

Council Elections Held in Dallas

Spring is the time for newness and it is no different within Affirmation. It is the time when members of the Affirmation Council who have completed their terms go off the Council and new members are elected. The outgoing Council members are: Gloria Soliz from San Francisco, CA.; Nancy Levan from Fresno, CA.; Jan Olson from Chicago; John Calhoun from Oklahoma City; and a man from Chicago. The individuals named who could not attend the Affirmation Gathering in Dallas were recognized and honored at the Saturday night banquet.

At the business meeting during the gathering the Affirmation Council presented a list of five candidates for the open positions. These five were elected to the Council, of which two were elected pending their acceptance of the nomination. Those elected to the Council to serve a three year term were Judy Hicks of Evanston, IL.; John Calhoun from Oklahoma City (elected to a second term), Richard Bates from Austin, TX; a woman from New York, NY. The fifth person, upon being contacted after the business meeting, had to decline the nomination. A mail ballot election will be held to fill the final at-large position on the Council.

Congratulations and welcome to the newly elected Council members!

RCP News

Bound for the Promised Land--July 13-16 in Minneapolis

Members and friends of Reconciling Congregations (RCs), Campus Ministries (RCMs), and Conferences are making final preparations to trek to Minneapolis for the fourth national RCP convocation beginning July 13.

Bound for the Promised Land promises to be another watershed event in the RC movement. The number of RCs and RCMs has increased by 50% since the last convocation in July 1993. This growth will be evident in increased attendance and energy at the July convocation.

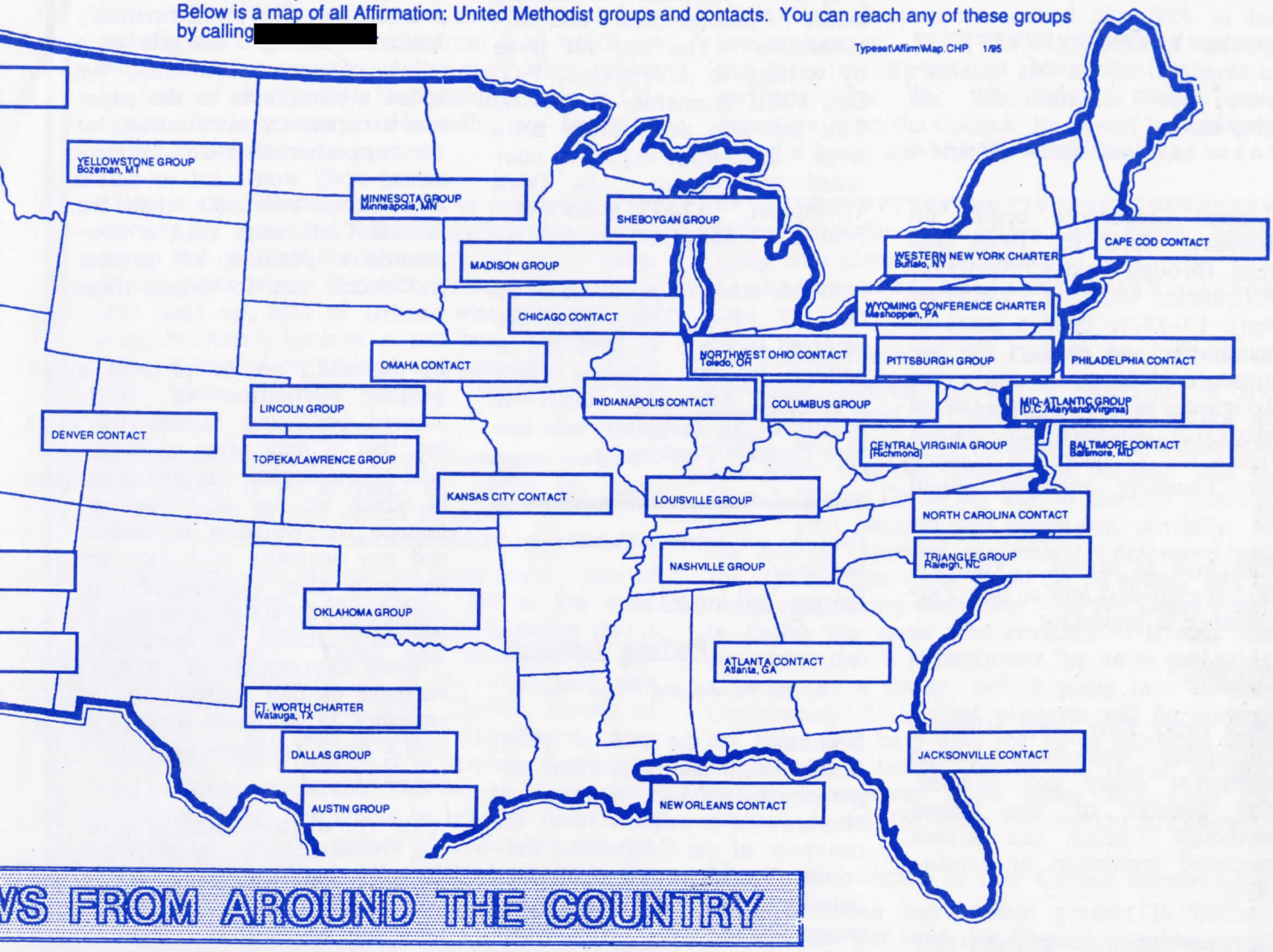
The convocation is a unique opportunity for current RCs and RCMs and for "exploring" groups to interact with the national RC movement. Since convocations happen only every two or three years, it is well worth making a special effort to come to Minneapolis in July.

The local host committee, comprised of the four Minneapolis RCs and other area churches, is preparing a hospitable welcome for participants.

Brochures, schedules and other information are available from the RCP office, 3801 N. Keeler Ave., Chicago, IL 60641.

Local Groups, Contacts and Charters

Below is a map of all Affirmation: United Methodist groups and contacts. You can reach any of these groups by calling [redacted]



WS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

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of Wyoming

eets weekly for a ry Sunday at 7:00- thex of Tabernacle Binghamton, New ers attended the a byterian Church orientation and the urch to gay issues. n write to [redacted] NY [redacted] or

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uary. The PO Box

will remain active for anyone in the Central Virginia area who may wich to correspond with, or for information about concerns of Gays and Lesbians and the United Methodist Church. Write to [redacted] Hanover, VA [redacted]. For more information call [redacted].

Shalom Ministries is creating a safe place where people can live without fear. On Tuesdays, there is a grief support group for gay men and lesbians grieving the loss of their partners or other family members. On Wednesdays there is a Men's coming out group. Fifty-six people gathered February 17-18 for the first Building the Spirit Retreat held in Oregon. The retreat was planned to create a network of people committed to reconciling ministries. For more information about Shalom Ministries write to [redacted] Portland, OR [redacted] or call [redacted].

If your group was not mentioned in this issue, its because I haven't heard from you. Please send a copy of your Newsletter or information about how, when, and where your group meets. Be sure to include a contact person, address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, [redacted] San Francisco, CA [redacted]

Gen'l Conf...from page one

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...an event designed to...support...human rights for all people...

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General Conference begins on Tuesday, April 16, 1996, and runs through Friday, April 26. Affirmation will hold a gathering April 13-15 to build a sense of community and support for our presence. Currently, an event designed to highlight United Methodist support for human rights for all people is planned for Thursday morning, April 18.

Plan now to attend. You will find friends and lots to do. Our presence is important.

Petitions

Once every four years, General Conference determines United Methodist polity and policies. Any member of The United Methodist Church can submit proposed legislation or resolutions.

Each petition must address only one paragraph of the Discipline, or, if not related to the Discipline, only one issue. Petitions that suggest changes in the Discipline must include the exact language of the change. For uniformity, petitioners are asked to double underline proposed additions to the Discipline and to single underline proposed deletions.

Not only is it not necessary to make involved arguments for proposed changes; we are asked to be succinct. Each petition must be signed by the person submitting it and must include an address and local church relationship.

Affirmation has drafted a set of proposed petitions addressing issues of homosexuality and heterosexism. You can get these by writing to Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204. You can also draft other petitions. Send three copies of your typed petition to: Ms. Odell Thompson, [redacted] Beloit, WI [redacted].

Petitions must be postmarked by Dec. 17, 1995. Those which are received by Sept. 1, 1995 will be printed in the Advance Daily Christian Advocate which is mailed to all delegates well before General Conference.

From the Los Angeles Affirmation Newsletter:

Defining "Self-Avowed Practicing Homosexual"

by Ed Hansen and Frank Wulf

Beginning at the end of 1994, Frank Wulf and I worked together to produce a paper in response to a request from the convener of the Conference Definition Committee for input on a definition for "self-avowed practicing homosexual." Our paper is too long to produce in this newsletter, but some of you had the opportunity to see a draft we presented at [LA] Affirmation's January meeting. Largely as a result of your comments, we added a paragraph to the paper which expresses our outrage at the suggestion that any ecclesiastical body would act to define this term, and asks that the Annual Conference take a conscientious position of protest and decide not to define these words.

In the end, we do propose a working definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual," but this is only after a discussion of theological considerations in which we say that "we renounce the equation of lesbian and gay sexuality with evil, for we have also experienced our sexual encounters with others of the same gender as sacraments ...these expressions of intimacy reassure us that lesbian and gay sexuality is as much a part of God's good creation as heterosexuality.

After the discussion of theological considerations, we offer reflections on paragraph 402.2. We observe that the passage acts as a call for lesbigay clergy to

Please turn to page ten....

1995 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

DEADLINE DATE	PUBLICATION DATE
FALL	
July 11, 1995	August 11, 1995
WINTER	
October 17, 1995	November 17, 1995

All submissions should be sent to:
National Affirmation
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204

Reconciling Congregation Program

Chicago, Illinois

Dear Affirmation friends:

Greetings to you on the celebration of your 20th anniversary from the Reconciling Congregation Program board of directors!

Your steadfast witness to justice for lesbian, bisexual and gay persons in The United Methodist Church has embodied the spirit of the Living Christ and has been a beacon of hope for so many persons. While our church has been slow in confessing and cleansing its homophobia and heterosexism, again and again your voice has invited the church to reclaim faithfulness to the good news of Jesus Christ and to the inclusive Body of Christ. Your witness has led the church forward!

One particular manifestation of your witness was the birthing and nurturing of the Reconciling Congregation Program. Your vision of a movement of congregations committed to welcoming lesbian, gay and bisexual persons and the work of your members in making this vision reality has resulted in a vital, growing movement which now encompasses 92 Reconciling Congregations, 4 Reconciling Conferences, 6 Reconciling Campus Ministries and numerous other "reconciling" groups. What a gift you have given to the church!

It is most appropriate that your 20th anniversary gathering be in this season of Eastertide. Your witness for a diverse, just and inclusive community of faith is truly the promise of new life for the church.

May the Spirit of the living God continue to embolden your prophetic witness and to open the hearts and minds of United Methodists to the good news you proclaim in your ministry. The Reconciling Congregation Program looks forward to continuing to work in partnership with you to proclaim God's message of unconditional grace and love for the whole family of God.

Peace,

Shirley Dare, chair

RCP board of directors

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T-Shirts Available

A few T-Shirts from the Affirmation 20th Anniversary meeting are still available. The shirts are in a medium aqua color with a small left chest design.

Shirts are available in sizes L, XL and only one 2XL.

To order send name, address, sizes, number to:

Judy WestLee
[redacted]
Minneapolis, MN [redacted]

Shirts cost $10 plus $2 handling (total of $12 each)

WANTED -- ITEMS FOR TWO FEATURE COLUMNS!

"THE CLOSET CORNER" -- stories of how members have been able to "come out" to family and friends--their experiences, and suggestions for those who are still in the closet.

"OF THINGS SPIRITUAL" -- personal stories of our relationship to God and of God's love for us *just as we are*.

Send your stories to the Editor, Newsletter, c/o Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204. Your name will not be used unless you request it.

Finance Report

As National Affirmation completed its fiscal year April 30, 1995, I am pleased to report that we exceeded our expectations. Although our budget was $15,800, our income was $22,287 and our expenditures were $23,853. The increase in income is largely attributed to a special grant to seed the employment of a part-time staff person for six months. The seed apparently germinated as we were able to continue this position for the full year.

A budget totaling $22,770 for the new fiscal year was adopted at the April Council Meeting in Dallas. The increase represents extraordinary expenses for General Conference preparation and continued part-time staff employment.

Representatives of National Affirmation will need to attend a few preparatory meetings with the General Conference planning committees and the other UMC caucuses. Our interests continue to receive growing support and it is crucial that we be present to nurture our supporters in these meetings. The 1996 General Conference will have agenda time (approx. two hours) for presentation of Human Rights issues. Affirmation is expected to facilitate this event.

The Stewardship chair has changed to Sam Wilson. The former chair has completed his term on the National Council.

Please show your support of National Affirmation's purpose and actions by returning the following pledge/donation form.

Sam Wilson, Chair
Stewardship Committee

Affirmation Pledge Commitment

I want to be a part of Affirmation's expanding ministry to and among gay men, lesbians and bisexual people. You can count on me for the following support:

□ $500 □ $250 □ $100 □ $50 □ $25 □ $_____
(please specify)

You can expect my contribution: □ annually □ quarterly □ monthly

Name_____ **Home Phone:**_____

Address_____
(Street) (City/Town) (State and Zip)

Return to: National Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204

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engage in one of two immoral acts: either lying regarding our sexuality or denying who we are at the very core of our God-given beings.

We also assert that "it is not appropriate for the Annual Conference to define any group of persons to whom it has denied a voice," and ask whether it is moral for the conference to engage in this process for purposes of excluding lesbigays from ordained ministry.

Finally, we offer our own reflections on the words themselves. We declare that to "practice" being a "self-avowed" homosexual is to live and give thanks to God for the gift of another day. "Practicing," we assert, "cannot be separated from the rest of our being."

While we are not optimistic that the majority of the members of conference will agree with our message, we can only hope that the number who understand it will continue to grow. For ourselves, we know we are called to respond to the work of the Spirit of Christ in our lives by speaking out in this way.